MINNESOTA
BOARD OF ANIMAL HEALTH

Meeting Minutes: December Board Meeting

Date: December 3, 2025
Location: MinnWest Technology Campus (1700 Technology Dr NE, Willmar, MN 56201), and teleconference on Microsoft Teams.

Attendance

Board Members

- Erica Sawatzke, President
- Peggy Anne Hawkins, DVM, Vice President
- Steve Neil
- Alex Stade
- Brandon Schafer
- Abigail Maynard, DVM

Consultants to the Board

- Mary Wood, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Stacy Holzbauer, Minnesota Department of Health
- Laura Molgaard, University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine
- Hemant Naikare, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

Guests

- Dr. Jennifer Siembieda, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services
- Kolby LeJeune, NextNest Hatching
- Dr. Carol Cardona, University of Minnesota

Staff

- Brian Hoefs
- Shauna Voss
- Heather Damico

Call to Order

Ms. Erica Sawatzke called the meeting to order. Following introductions, Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes from the September quarterly meeting. Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins made a motion. Mr. Brandon Schafer seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Alex Stade moved to approve the agenda. Mr. Schafer seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Board of Animal Health Update

Dr. Brian Hoefs, State Veterinarian and Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, gave an update on actions of Board staff since the last meeting.

A few items of concern regarding animal health are making national and international news.

New World Screwworm (NWS) has been detected as close as 70 miles from the southern border of the United States. In late September, a heifer was moved without proper paperwork to a feedlot and had the pest. No other detections have been found at that feedlot. Another feedlot around 120 miles from the border has reported a detection of NWS. The animal in question was inspected multiple times before larvae were found.

USDA has launched a new website to provide the latest updates on NWS and curtailing the spread of the insect. Also under development are sterile fly production and distribution facilities in Panama, Mexico and the United States. The facility in Pacora, Panama, is currently active while the Metapa, Mexico facility is being renovated for active use. Another facility at Moore Air Base in Texas is in the planning stages. USDA is also conducting fly trapping along the southern border, and wildlife are being monitored for signs of infestation. Off-label treatments exist for infestations of the maggots, and steps are being taken to get approval for pharmaceuticals for treatment through the proper channels. Wildlife risk assessments are underway to determine what species may bring the disease into the country. Locally, the Board is working with the Minnesota Department of Health to plan for possible infestations in the state and take precautions for human cases as well.

On Oct. 31, 2025, Vesicular Stomatitis was detected in southern Arizona. VS is a highly contagious disease affecting cattle, swine, goats, sheep, and camelids that is spread by biting midges. The disease has also been known to have zoonotic potential. No new cases have been reported as of Nov. 24, 2025.

The companion animal program continues to see cases of rabies and tularemia pop up around the state. Canine brucellosis cases have also been reported. Brucellosis infection leaves dog owners with two options: quarantine the animal for life or euthanasia. Tracking the disease is difficult and problems appear with reliable testing before importing animals from areas where it is endemic. The companion animal program is looking into revamping the import requirements to help keep the disease contained and out of Minnesota.

A Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) exercise is slated for summer of 2026. USDA set up the tabletop exercise to work through FMD vaccine planning for shipment, distribution and application. Minnesota was not originally planning to participate, but Nebraska had to drop out of the exercise and Dr. Hoefs brought Minnesota into the program.

USDA is stepping up a program called the HPAI Poultry Innovation Grand Challenge to fund new ideas for combatting HPAI with $100 million in funding for projects across the nation. Six proposals that were accepted came from Minnesota: two proposals from the University of Minnesota (UMN) to develop novel vaccines, one from UMN to develop novel therapeutics, and two from UMN and one from the Turkey Research Council for research into improving response strategy.

Electronic Certificates of Veterinary Inspection

Dr. Katie Cornille, senior veterinarian in charge of cattle, animal disease traceability and livestock concentration points programs, gave an update on the upcoming changes in requirements for certificates of veterinary inspection (CVIs).

As of Jan. 1, 2026, the Board will no longer accept paper CVIs. Instead, only electronic CVIs, or eCVIs, will be accepted. The deadline is part of a plan to streamline efficiencies and processes at the Board, increase accuracy, and improve traceability. By using eCVIs, fewer opportunities for errors exist, less money will be spent on paper, printing, and personnel hours.

Veterinary providers in Minnesota can contract with a service to provide them with the required documentation or use a no-cost eCVI service. The no-cost options have limitations in terms of when they can be used and by whom. Private vendors have to meet standards of the National Association of State Animal Health Officials (NASAHO) and must be approved. The paid services are generally easier to use. A full list of available options can be found on the Board's website. If the form is filled out incorrectly, it is marked as noncompliant. The Board will email the submitter with a report of issues with the eCVI. Repeated issues can lead to compliance warnings/notices. Continued violations may affect accreditation. If a veterinarian knows about an issue or wants to make a correction, they should contact the Board.

In advance of the change, the Board made efforts to conduct outreach to veterinarians through webinars, website updates, social media, and email blasts. Import queries also have led to 1-on-1 contacts with veterinarians and an opportunity to remind them of the new requirement.

Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Update

Dr. Hemant Naikare, Director of the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL), gave an update on the lab's work.

850,000 tests per year

Upcoming and recent retirements:

- Dr. Rob Porter, poultry pathologist
- Dr. Stephanie Rossow, swine pathologist and molecular diagnostics section head
- Dr. Connie Gebhart, bacteriology section head
- Karen Olsen, bacteriology manager
- Mary Thurn, VDL-IT-LIMS, auxiliary services

The laboratory has filled four faculty positions. Currently the lab has ten pathologists, three microbiologists and two clinicians. An additional four staff positions will be opening in early 2026. Hiring and staffing is a critical challenge for the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL), as testing has increased 25 percent in the first five months of Fiscal Year 2026. Two additional full-time positions are needed to support increased caseloads and maintain testing turnaround time for long-term business sustainability for foreign animal disease and reportable disease testing. Dr. Naikare asked for the Board's support for the MPTL.

Equipment to conduct bacterial identification known as MALDI-TOF MS is on order. Funding for the equipment came through American Rescue Planning Funding. The equipment is estimated to be delivered in January 2026.

Ms. Sawatzke asked what sort of support the MPTL is looking for from the Board and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Dr. Naikare said the support needed would be financial.

College of Veterinary Medicine Update

Dr. Laura Molgaard gave an update on the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine.

The University of Minnesota has completed its strategic roadmap and defined five strategic imperatives:

- Prepare students to be fully engaged and active in our state, nation and world.
- Innovate to transform the future of learning.
- Serve communities through knowledge creation and exchange in the arts, health, healthcare and the economy.
- Advance our excellence to lead the discovery and application of sustainable solutions, improving environmental, human, plant and animal health.
- Secure our future as a world-class university by strategically investing in our talented workforce, operations and facilities.

The next step is for each college within the university to align their goals with the strategic imperatives.

The St. Paul Campus Reinvestment project is underway with three focus areas:

- Student experience
- Community engagement
- Interconnected futures: Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, Raptor Center, One Health Center

UMN secured four grants through the USDA HPAI Poultry Innovation Grand Challenge. Two proposals to develop novel vaccines, one to develop novel therapeutics, and two for research for improving response strategy. Four of those proposals involved members of the CVM.

Curriculum revision is underway and has been broken down to prepare new veterinarians for a changing landscape. Faculty and staff are refining and organizing content based on feedback to build a curriculum that is well-structured, outcome-driven and creates a solid foundation for learner success.

Dr. Molgaard said staffing issues are still a current issue. Because of overall budgetary restrictions and contractions, filling positions and allocating funds has become more difficult.

Department of Health Update

Dr. Stacy Holzbauer, State Public Health Veterinarian, gave an update on the work of MDH related to zoonotic disease.

As of Dec. 3, 2025, MDH has taken reports of 2,698 human exposures to HPAI. Currently, eight people are being monitored for symptoms. Of those reported exposures, 109 reported symptoms, and testing was carried out on 85. No human infections with H5N1 have been found.

To date, there have been 71 human cases of H5N1 in the United States. Most of those cases are the result of exposure to infected dairy cattle.

MDH is working with local public health to promote seasonal influenza vaccine among farmworkers in rural areas. Fifteen vaccination clinics have been conducted with over 500 people getting shots.

Washington state reported first human infection of H5N5 and resulting death. The individual had exposure to backyard poultry and was an older adult with underlying health issues. The strain is closely related to wild bird isolates from eastern Canada.

This has been a record year for tularemia cases in humans and animals. The disease, also known as "rabbit fever," infects over 200 species. Pets are typically exposed through hunting, ticks or flies. Most human cases are vector borne, meaning from ticks or other insects, but around 23% of human cases are contracted from pets. There has been a dramatic increase in cases over the last five years, which could be attributed to increased testing and awareness, but likely increase in disease prevalence as well.

On Nov. 8, 2025, CDC and FDA announced a multistate outbreak of infant botulism related to Heart Whole Nutrition Infant Formula. Botulism spores colonize in a baby's large intestine and create a neurotoxin. Suspected cases need immediate treatment, which should begin even before laboratory confirmation of botulism. As of Nov. 26, 2025, 37 cases have been reported nationally. Two of those cases were in Minnesota. Both were hospitalized. No deaths have been reported.

Dr. Hawkins asked if there is a specific ingredient that is bringing the botulism spores into the formula. Dr. Holzbauer said there were reports of construction in one of the manufacturing facilities. That is one of the leading theories how the spores got into the formula.

Understanding HPAI Viruses

Dr. Carol Cardona of the University of Minnesota spoke on the variability of HPAI viruses and the differences between the 2015 HPAI outbreak and the current outbreak.

The 2014/2015 outbreak was able to be eliminated by stamping out the virus through depopulations. While the virus was introduced by wild birds, it was perpetuated by transmission between domesticated birds. Depopulation of the domesticated birds resulted in the virus being eliminated, and the outbreak was stopped.

The current outbreak is quite different. The virus source is maintained in wild birds and perpetuated by their movements. Stamping out the source will not be effective because it will continue to be introduced by wild birds. Depopulations will help stop the spread to other farms but won't stop the outbreak. Preventing the infection for domesticated poultry is really the only option to stop the outbreak.

This year was a particularly bad year for HPAI because the virus is changing, and immunities in certain species are waning. This leads to more infections in wild waterfowl and subsequently more virus introductions into domestic poultry.

Next year will likely have fewer cases as immunity builds in certain wild waterfowl populations. We are doing very well at controlling poultry outbreaks successfully, we have no human cases, and partnerships between public health and animal health organizations are strong.

Poultry Program Update

Dr. Shauna Voss, assistant director of the Board, gave an update on the state of poultry diseases in Minnesota.

In the past 30 days, there has been an uptick in the number of cases of HPAI being reported nationally. There have been 97 confirmed flocks reported to USDA in the last 30 days. In Minnesota, there have been 210 cases since the start of the outbreak. Around 9.9 million birds have been depopulated since 2022.

Since Sept. 16, the state has seen 24 cases: 16 commercial meat-type turkeys, four commercial turkey breeders, and four backyard (WOAH non-poultry) flocks.

The response to a report of illness works largely the same way each time. Sick birds are reported to the Board either by phone, email or an online submission form. Samples are submitted and tested at a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) lab. If the first laboratory finds the samples to be avian influenza positive and H5 reactive, it's considered a presumptive positive. Samples are then forwarded to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa, for confirmation. Action, however, does not wait for the confirmation. The Board delivers quarantines, assigns case managers and a field reimbursement specialist, and establishes a flock plan designating who is responsible for each activity.

The goal is to depopulate the premises within 24 hours. Disposal is usually done through composting. A compost pile subject matter expert is assigned to ensure the composting is done correctly. The date when the compost is capped is important because it determines the timeline for verification. Temperature is verified and turned on a schedule and can be released. If everything goes according to the plan, the entire process takes around 28 days.

The next steps are initial virus elimination, cleaning, post-cleaning inspection, disinfection, and environmental testing.

Before farms can restock and repopulate their barns, all infected farms must pass a biosecurity compliance audit (BCAP) if they want to be able to qualify for indemnity payments in the future. The BCAP includes a written biosecurity plan review, documentation review and onside biosecurity compliance verification. Then a restock approval can be granted and the quarantine released. Consistency in the BCAP audits has been a challenge, as the interpretation of compliance can be subjective.

Department of Natural Resources Update

Dr. Mary Wood, State Wildlife Veterinarian at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), gave an update on the work of the DNR regarding wildlife and disease in Minnesota.

The DNR 2025 CWD Surveillance program took a multi-pronged approach. Targeted mandatory testing was done in areas of known or suspected disease. The DNR held voluntary testing in these areas outside of firearms opening weekend. The remainder of the state has voluntary testing for all seasons.

Opening weekend 2025 by the numbers:

- 312 staff and students
- 59 staffed stations
- 29 self-service stations
- 7,964 CWD samples collected

Total to date: 11,782 CWD samples collected.

Minnesota is part of the national USDA HPAI surveillance plan based on watersheds. Focus on sampling live or hunter-harvested dabbling and diving ducks. The surveillance program is designed for random sampling and sample sizes appropriate for disease detection, distribution, and viral dynamics. As of early October, 699 birds were tested in 2025 across Minnesota. Sampling will continue through the spring. Virus activity was apparent in the fall.

DNR also works on passive surveillance of HPAI in wild bird populations. This involves taking reports from public and field personnel, and general disease monitoring and identifying species clinically affected. This is a partnership with wildlife rehabilitators, raptor programs, and the UMN HPAI Research Project.

Around 85 sick or dead bird reports have come to DNR since June, and 10 have been submitted for testing. Canada geese, crows and pelicans are the most common species. HPAI detections were found in Canada geese in Ottertail and Le Sueur Counties. Minnesota Raptor Center reported detections in many raptors throughout the state.

DNR is conducting research projects in a variety of species. The Northwest Elk Research Project aims to look at survival recruitment, cause of mortality, habitat selection and movement analysis. This will lead to improvement of the elk population model. Researchers are planning for two years of captures, with the goal of 25 cows and 15 bulls per year.

The Recruitment and Fecundity of Minnesota Moose Project is scheduled to begin helicopter captures in January 2026. The plan is to capture and collar juvenile moose during their first winter. This will help determine recruitment, fecundity, survival rates, cause-specific mortality and age at first reproduction of young moose in Northeast Minnesota. This project is a partnership with 1854 Treaty Authority.

EHM (Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy) Outbreak Update

Dr. Heather Damico, senior veterinarian in charge of equine programs at the Board, gave an update on a recent outbreak of Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1). She said the current outbreak of Equine Herpes Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), the neurologic form of EHV, is hopefully nearing an end.

EHV-1 is endemic in horses, and most horses are exposed to the virus by the time they are adults. It causes upper respiratory diseases in horses, abortions in mares, and it can become a neuropathogenic form known as EHM, which includes neurologic clinical signs. Incubation for the virus is 4-7 days usually but can be a lot longer than that for clinical signs to show up. Viral shedding is usually 7-10 days but can be a lot longer. Quarantines are 21 days to cover these extra time periods.

The current EHM outbreak started at a horse show in Waco, Texas, Nov. 5-9. Approximately 1,000 horses were at the event. When it was over, the horses dispersed to a variety of locations. This is the busy season for southern horse shows. A lot of those horses went to other shows and events. A few horses went to Guthrie,

Oklahoma, for another show Nov. 17-18, which hosted over 1,200 horses. The Guthrie show was canceled due to the outbreak, and there was nowhere to quarantine all of the horses, so they went home. All the horses currently showing neurological signs are epidemiologically linked to the Waco show.

Tracking numbers of affected horses has been difficult. Minnesota has no EHM cases associated with the outbreak currently. There are 15 premises quarantined with 24 exposed horses total. One horse did show clinical signs consistent with EHM but tested negative and is improving. The horse community is taking the outbreak very seriously. Some events have been canceled or postponed.

Positives are still popping up around the country. We know which horses were at the individual shows but given movements and horse-to-horse contact, it's good to stay on top of the quarantines. An increase in calls about import questions has provided many of opportunities for connection with the public on the subject.

EHM is reportable in Minnesota, but EHV-1 is not reportable. The best test for EHM is a PCR positive nasal swab with neurologic signs.

Ms. Sawatzke asked if there has been discussion in the horse industry regarding changing the requirements for showing at future horse events. Dr. Damico said no. When outbreaks happen, we find more people are more educated about biosecurity practices. Dr. Hoefs said some of the shows are shortening their durations.

NextNest Hatching

Kolby LeJeune, tech service specialist of NextNest Hatching, gave a presentation on the company's approach to hatching and transporting commercial poultry. Using partner company HatchTech's light, feed and water equipment for turkeys, NextNest is working to bring this system into turkey hatcheries to provide an opportunity for increased hatch rates over conventional methods, which do not provide feed or water until about two days after hatch.

NextNest's system provides feed and water to newly hatched poultry in their hatchery, Headstart (Willmar, Minnesota). This leads to growth in the development of the intestinal tract of the birds with a head start on micro-flora. Subsequently, mortality rates are lower due to minimized impacts of starve-outs, gorging and temperature sensitivity.

Ms. LeJeune shared a diagram and photos of Headstart Hatchery in Willmar. After the eggs have been in incubators for 24 to 26 hours, the viable eggs are transferred to hatching trays with feed and transported into the hatchers. Here, poults have access to water, food and light for the next three days until service day, when they are sexed and given other services at the customer's discretion. After servicing, poults go back into the hatchers with feed and water until they are loaded onto trucks and delivered to farms.

Ms. Sawatzke asked about the specialized transportation this company utilizes. Ms. LeJeune said when the animals are transported to farms, specialized shipping containers are used to ensure temperatures are maintained at a tolerable level and air flow is consistent.

Dr. Hawkins asked about the ratio of toms to hens (51 percent to 49 percent) in production. Ms. LeJeune said the numbers shared are average. Some weeks have higher and lower numbers.

National Milk Testing Strategy

Dr. Jennifer Siembieda with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service gave an update on the National Milk Testing Strategy (NMTS).

USDA's action strategy is to identify and respond to detections, control and eliminate circulating virus, provide support to producers, and understand the virus in cattle. The National Milk Testing Strategy is part of the virus elimination step. The NMTS is set up to identify where the virus is affecting herds, support biosecurity efforts, and inform critical efforts to protect farm workers. Forty-six states are enrolled in the NMTS and are performing active surveillance. Thirty-four states are currently listed as unaffected. Eight states are listed as provisionally unaffected.

The spread of H5N1 between states is generally linked to cattle movements with further local spread between dairy and poultry premises through direct and indirect transmissions routes. Biosecurity is key to mitigate the risk of disease spread. National surveillance testing is critical to understanding the distribution of the virus to quickly respond and eliminate circulating virus from the nation's livestock and poultry.

Adjourn

The first quarterly meeting of 2026 will take place Feb. 4, 2026, at a location yet to be determined. The second quarterly meeting of 2026 will take place April 1, 2026, at a location yet to be determined.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Hawkins made the motion. Mr. Stade seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hoefs
Executive Director
State Veterinarian